



South River Technologies Case Study

LABWARE, INC.

Solution Overview

Industry

Laboratory Information Management Systems (LIMS) Software

Application

Document Collaboration, Remote File Access

Background

LabWare provides best-in-class Laboratory Automation software solutions to meet the data handling requirements of laboratories in diverse industries spread around the world. A Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) is software used in laboratories for the management of samples, instruments, users, standards and other laboratory functions. LabWare is a market leader in global LIMS applications, with the majority of LabWare customers being Fortune 500 companies, using their LIMS across multiple sites.

Customer Issue

Labware was using an FTP Server to collaborate with internal employees, consultants and contractors, as well as customers. Because FTP protocol focuses on just the transfer of files, real-time collaboration was not possible under this implementation. "We were trying to use FTP in ways that it wasn't intended," says Jeremy Upole, Labware IT Manager. "It just didn't have document collaboration and security that we needed to support our wide range of users. FTP wasn't cutting it."

The FTP Server was difficult to manage, and did not scale well. It became increasingly difficult to manage permissions. There needed to be administrator involvement every time a simple permission had to be set. The system was not dynamic enough to meet Labware's growing need.

There was no simple way for users to share files with each other, or to easily collaborate on files with customers or other outside users.

Search Process

Labware began looking for a solution by simply doing an internet search for "group collaboration software". While there were many solutions to look at, Labware quickly eliminated a number of options due to proprietary technologies or lack of flexibility.

"We liked GroupDrive's option of having either a web interface or a client," says, Upole. "While the virtual drive client is a great productivity tool, there are times when it's not practical to install client software. Having both options was important."

Labware consultants are typically working at customer sites, where they may not install additional software on the customer's computers, and in many cases can't get a port open for FTP. Using a browser-based interface eliminates both of these issues.

Another key issue in Labware's search was the ability to quickly send a file to an external user. The GroupDrive QuickLink capability met the additional criteria in their search process.



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"The feedback from our project managers was that 'it's great that we can put our files here and always have access to them'."

Jeremy Upole
IT Manager

Evaluation process

Labware requested the full-function GroupDrive trial. The structure of Labware's FTP server content was similar to how GroupDrive organized users. Labware pointed GroupDrive to the FTP structures that were already set up. "We literally laid GroupDrive on top of the FTP server structure. It was entirely seamless," say Upole. "It just worked."

Labware's initial focus was to test the GroupDrive QuickLinks. The IT group tested the use of QuickLinks internally for about a week. The test team was made up of operations staff, IT, the support team, and software developers. Labware created a number of common scenarios to see how QuickLinks would work in their environment. After a week of testing, the participants were asked to provide their feedback. The test team "overwhelmingly liked it."

Testing the GroupDrive Virtual Drive client and the Web Interface was the next part of the testing. The Virtual Drive technology worked flawlessly, and enabled users to easily collaborate on large ODBC databases. GroupDrive created the ability to create test databases "on-the-fly", use them for project work and then dispose of them. The ability to easily share databases with other users was a significant productivity enhancement.

Implementation

Migration to the production server was seamless. The initial implementation defined 300 user accounts. Labware chose to use GroupDrive's native authentication capabilities, rather than integrating with Active Directory. The entire production system was built in about 3 hours, with the most time consuming aspect being importing the files from the FTP server.

Several directory paths had to be modified after the file import, and a few accounts had to be updated. "It was a very painless process. What we thought would take us all night was literally accomplished in a few hours," explains Upole. "The support site is great. There's excellent documentation on how to upgrade the database, configure the servers and define the file sets."



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Project work

GroupDrive has proven to be a very flexible solution for Labware. Different groups within the company use GroupDrive in different ways. Once the users become comfortable with the application, it's easy to tailor it to suit their own needs.

Technical Support

One of the primary requirements for Labware was the ability to easily receive large database files from customers and share them amongst the technical support team members. Previously, the technical support team had to put huge databases on their laptops, burdening the machine with significant processing cycles and storage requirements.

"GroupDrive has really streamlined our support process, enabling us to quickly resolve issues", says Upole. "Customers can quickly send us their database and we can recreate an issue in minimal steps, correct the configuration and return the corrected database to the customer."

The support team works with users over the phone, but being able to see the database files and easily modify them, has increased productivity and shortened response times for customers.

Project managers

For pre-sales projects, it's been easy for sales managers to create folders on GroupDrive and share them with the team. This is a simple way to have all of the pre-sales project documents in a single location. Users can easily access and make modifications to files. These files may include hardware recommendations, technical implementation documents, price quotes, and other sales documents.

User-to-user sharing is one of the GroupDrive features most heavily used by Labware. Easy access to files by a distributed team has made managing pre-sales documents simple for the members of the project. All of the projects are backed up to a separate server and are archived when the project is complete.

Consultants

Labware uses hundreds of consultants domestically and abroad. These consultants may be working from home or a customer site. Because the consultants are not typically connected to the Labware internal network, GroupDrive has become the primary means for backing up their PCs. Using GroupDrive's built-in backup feature, consultants can easily schedule full or partial backups of their PC to the GroupDrive server.



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Applications

Because the GroupDrive Client maps a drive letter to the GroupDrive Server, any client-based application that reads or writes to a drive letter is instantly integrated with the GroupDrive Server. Labware has found GroupDrive to be useful to broad file distribution, such as the distribution of software updates and major new releases of their software. By pointing Lotus Notes to shares in GroupDrive, Labware can easily use existing distribution lists to efficiently deliver updates to customers and their distributed workforce.

Summary

Labware has been able to rapidly convert and unwieldy file transfer environment based upon FTP and email attachments, into a powerful document collaboration environment that has enhanced productivity, streamlined the technical support process and facilitated collaboration with partners, consultants and customers. To summarize their experiences with GroupDrive, Jeremy Upole says, "The more we use it and the deeper we dig, the more we keep discovering productivity features."